



The diverse array of coastal wetland and estuarine ecosystems around the Gulf coast provide numerous ecological and economic benefits, including improved water quality, nurseries for fish, wildlife habitat, flood buffers, erosion control and recreational opportunities. While the sustainability of the Gulf's coastal wetlands is under increasing pressure from erosion, subsidence, rising sea levels and land development, opportunities exist to protect and restore wetlands, coastal dunes, marshes, bayous, mangroves, seagrass meadows and shellfish beds.

Coastal Wetland Restoration Strengths: Existing Programs and Agency Networks

Each of the Gulf states have programs committed to restoring wetlands or estuarine habitats that engage a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including:

- National Estuarine Research Reserves and National Estuary Programs.
- Federal assistance provided through the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act.
- Alabama's purchase of more than 100,000 acres in the Mobile-Tensaw river delta.
- The \$8 billion state-federal partnership to restore America's Everglades, a 2.4 million-acre marsh.
- Florida's Surface Water Improvement and Management program.
- Texas' Coastal Erosion Planning and Response Act, which provides funds for beach renourishment, shoreline protection and marsh restoration.
- Mississippi's Coastal Preserves program, which has created an active acquisition and management strategy for coastal wetlands.
- Beneficial use of Dredged Material programs that are restoring coastal wetlands using dredge material.

Coastal Wetland Restoration Challenges and Barriers

The cumulative impacts of rapid urban and suburban growth have led to increased development pressure on Gulf coastal wetlands. Louisiana faces loss of coastal wetlands due to structural controls on the Mississippi River. Other challenges include:

- A rapid rate of growth and development along the Gulf coast.
- Managing the effects of large forces such as rising sea levels, subsidence and erosion.
- Evaluating the success of restoration strategies.
- Limited availability of information on status and trends for coastal wetlands and estuarine ecosystems.
- Identifying and prioritizing areas for restoration.
- Cost of wetlands restoration and land acquisition.

Solutions and Opportunities to Improve Coastal Wetland Restoration

Since all Gulf states face similar challenges in restoring coastal wetlands or estuarine ecosystems, opportunities exist to implement joint strategies throughout the Gulf:

- Developing a regional restoration plan with specific success criteria and robust monitoring.
- Sharing knowledge on restoration techniques and lessons learned through joint working groups, conferences and workshops.
- Improving scientific understanding of the effects of rising sea levels and subsidence.
- Increasing the use of remote sensing technologies to provide baselines to measure success of wetland restoration efforts.
- Continuing state-federal partnerships such as the Fish & Wildlife Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program.
- Creating flexible incentives to support voluntary landowner conservation.

Needs from a State/Federal Partnership to Improve Coastal Wetland Restoration

- Protect or conserve existing wetlands.
- Implement "no net loss" through protection and restoration.
- Set restoration priorities at an ecosystem level.
- Research solutions to wetlands loss due to rising sea levels or subsidence.
- Expand and build on existing partnerships, such as a Gulf-wide restoration workgroup.
- Streamline funding and reduce paperwork requirements for wetland restoration.
- Develop educational programs to emphasize the intrinsic value of coastal wetlands.

